

Octavian Lazăr Cosma (București)

Romanian Music

In a world of open boundaries where the free circulation of spiritual assets and the impetuous flood of information is assured, it appears natural to attempt to assume the clarification of fundamental concepts regarding the art of sounds such as it has been the case in European countries or, to be more specific, in music composed during the 20th century. This stage that was formerly a privilege of a few centres, later of countries, has now been replaced. The united effort of generations has built an impressive thesaurus, generating patterns taken over by still crystallizing cultures which are, in their turn, creating their own musical patrimony whose powerful propensity needs

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level was realized by a progressive accumulation, involving incessantly new names of a consequently extending geographic range, coming to a real polymorphism out of which outstanding personalities of exceptional originality are rising, trespassing political frontiers, but without dissociating from the context that has created them. To put it another way, the existent musical cultures in different countries developed symbiotically, beyond border lines, impregnating with vigour, fragrance, and essence the zones out of which they finally sprouted, identifying themselves with it and, implicitly, representing it.

Therefore, what else are these musical cultures, located in all European countries, but “national schools”? The answer is not a simple one. It is well known that “national schools”, as established in universal history, are indissolubly connected with romanticism of the second half of the 19th century. Paradoxically, the concept of “national schools” is never applied to musical cultures more “advanced” in this respect: to Italian, German, and French music for which there are other specific marks: classic, romantic etc. For the “newcomers”, however, the notion calls for a term emanating rather from ethnicity.

The 20th century brings with it new tendencies with other denominations: impressionism, expressionism, neoclassicism. More than

that, stylistic tendencies are identified with techniques of formulation like the “New Viennese School” or “Verismo” etc. In the second half of the 20th century, other categories appeared such as “modern” and “postmodern”, which were also infiltrated by the term “vanguard”.

The “national schools” are continuing their existence, multiplying and extending themselves by deriving their components out of a union with the folklore matrix which confers distinction and individuality on it. The only difference is that the term “school”, having a precise significance (the transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil), is here completely missing. The composers, illustrated by more or less powerful and important individualities, are looking for original ways, not wishing to join the frame of any “collectivist style”. There have been several attempts to create such a style by the famous methods of “socialist realism”, by “brainwashing” and “alignment”, but the final result was a spontaneous escape, leading to a stylistic and technical radicalism which proliferated and dissolved the given “recipes”, extending the parametres of style and orientation, thus making the data of “national style” more difficult to recognize. To formulate this another way, the idea of “national schools” is now completely “out of date”, due to the lack of technical terms to sustain it. Therefore, it would be correct to consider that, in the 20th century, the music composed in each country may be identified, simply enough, with the country or the ethnical entity whom the respective composer belongs to. In our case, “Romanian music” which defines works created shortly after 1840, may be illustrated by George Ștefănescu’s *Uvertura Națională* (“National Overture”).

To establish the identity of Romanian music, I propose two moments of reference: the years 1920–1921 and 2000–2002, when the magazine *Muzica* undertook investigations among musicians on the specific marks of Romanian musical creation, whose existence had been denied by some people. The first investigation referred to so-called “forerunners”, i. e. composers who had established a certain professional skill for composition. It was the time when George Enescu, the undeniable leader of Romanian music, was radiating in full glory, and his generation was highly stimulated by the force of his example, including the “National Composition Prize”, an annual award bearing the name of the famous musician. The statements of

the participants focused on crucial problems: Is folk music able to serve the development of superior musical genres? What should be the attitude towards modern trends and future Romanian music? All that was far from being "in unison". The direct confrontation was not without some harshness, thus attesting contradictory positions, although all of the participants were united by the ideal of serving the art of sounds, as far as their professional virtues permitted it. It is beyond all doubt that the debate proved to be, at last, beneficial by guiding the composers in a more subtle way to realize a platform, maybe not quite even, but homogeneous in spirit.

In the period before 1920, two generations of composers can be distinguished in Romanian music. The first one was characterized by a clumsy, uncertain pen, led by the ambition to appropriate the great structures of European music, but preferable in its raw, immediate components, without any pedantry. Graduated from conservatories abroad, these composers did their best to be at the level of the supposed expectations of contemporary audiences. The second generation of composers corresponded to the first period of George Enescu's musical works and aimed at the extension of techniques, with an obvious preference for French music. Among these composers a more experienced group can be distinguished that was eager to follow the impressionist model of Debussy; the others, guided by the "Schola Cantorum" master Vincent d'Indy, showed off a traditionalist concept. The "flight" of the first category was one of high altitudes, whereas the others contented themselves with a lower flight. On the whole, this difference led to a separation between "national" and "universal" composers.

In all cases, the temptation of folklore is obvious, even if more accidental in the "universal" category. The apparition of a kind of abstraction of the modal structures, established already during the "pre-Enescu" phase, has to be emphasized. In the above-mentioned first inquiry, the values of the peasant sources of inspiration were plainly affirmed. The participants considered not the town folklore, with its fiddlers' elements and heterogeneous influences, as the authentic one that should be preferred, but music of the rural area which remained unaffected from these influences, although both sources were assiduously frequented. More interesting and fertile appeared to be a

new trend, which focused on religious music with ancient Byzantine roots. After eight decades, a second inquiry was organized whose coordinates were highly different, a fact easy to understand in the conditions of globalization and European integration. The great folklore researcher Constantin Brăiloiu considered that within the problem of what he named “national aesthetics”, there were various meanings, some opinions judging it even as “a failure”, because each author and each score reveal a multitude of contradictory features.

All composers understood clearly that George Enescu represents the standard bearer of Romanian musicians, because he succeeded in remaining a musician perfectly anchored in Romanian spirituality, in spite of the ordeals he was put through. He knew but too well the burden of tradition from which he could not escape; however, fully respecting it, he possessed sufficient intellectual and creative force to subdue it. He had a presentiment of new ways of composition that he sought to achieve through the study of the attributes of Romanian folklore. It is sufficient to note here the polyphony and heterophony which he made use of in his last years, as well as the chromatic modes that profoundly permeated the sheets of his last works. In this way, George Enescu surpassed the frames of a national idiom; the generation orienting itself towards the 1960s understood this.

A very important observation acknowledges that the interwar generation not only appropriated impressionist techniques, but also neo-classical ones, filtrated by Enescu himself when he tried to approach the expressional change. His language is not limited to the folklore argument; the motive – in the shading George Enescu gave it – is no more idealised, the mobility of the modal steps became much more tempting. Later on, affected by the “socialist-realist” platform, authentic composers succeeded in getting rid of the “academic” oversimplification, since exploring the vanguard was more promising at that time.

Consequently, coming into contact with the style of George Enescu’s mature works, the generation of the 1960s affirmed a detachment from the inhibitive ideological dogmas, appealing nonchalantly to the ABC of serialism, translated as the “chromatic total”. The following generation, that of the 1980s, introduced in the composer’s arsenal new grammars, archetypal techniques, minimalist, structural-

ist, mathematical techniques, textures, clusters, non-representative, open architectures, which frequently refer to folklore, but also to exoticism, barbarism and primitivism. Sometimes we see a score with the marks of folk melos, but it's seldom a simple quotation; composers prefer to transform the material using sophisticated techniques and bringing grist to the mill of abstraction, sublimation, synthesization (a way indicated by Enescu himself). The new Romanian music shows no taste for regional bounds, aspiring instead towards a transcontinental range, aiming at infinity... However, the data of Romanian spiritual space may be easily identified in the most important works which demonstrate that, even if the fruit falls sometimes far from the stem, it still remains a piece of Romanian music.

Only in such a context as described above would it be proper to go on with the syntagm "national schools", in spite of the techniques used in the scores. By its universal language, music was always an ideal messenger. Through their writing, Romanian composers are today closer than ever to one another. However, they remain faithful (everyone in his own way, of course) to the ideals that animated their forerunners, being conscious that they have to fulfil something very important. Does all that not mean to become fully aware of some perennial ideals, maybe not yet written down?...